

Before It Is Washed to the Sea? - Coastal Development and Erosion

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SUMMARY

The coastal erosion hazard is increasing with climate change (including sea-level rise and more frequent serious storm events) and with continuing demand for coastal land for development and housing. Our planning responses must focus on the infrastructure and social side of the hazard as there is little we can do to affect the climate. Experience has shown that interference with coastal processes has unintended consequences; sea walls exacerbate adjoining shoreline erosion and destroy the natural character of the coastal environment.

National and local policy statements identify the importance of natural landscapes and character of the coastal environment. District and Regional plans attempt to identify hazard zones. And yet coastal property remains subject to high development pressure, coastal property values continue to rise, and owners continue to resist the clear warnings about coastal hazard, and demand protection.

A variety of planning responses to coastal erosion, including managed retreat of existing development, setback lines and design restrictions for proposed development will be examined. Local case examples from the Otago coastline will illustrate the extent of coastal erosion, the range of approaches to halt erosion, and the planning responses affecting coastal property.

Property owners are understandably very protective of their land so resent anything that will adversely affect their investment; they object to their land being identified in a hazard zone, and restrictions imposed on their development potential. This paper concludes that coastal land owners must be prepared to balance the attractions of living on the coast with the threat of their land being lost to the sea. They should not expect public effort and money to protect their private assets. Land developers and local authorities should consider tenure arrangements that allow for short term occupation and use, but provide for longer term retreat.